

## 7 Habits of Highly Effective Brains

Brain science has concluded there are certain lifestyle habits that improve and maintain our brains' health and effectiveness. Certainly, this information may interest those who are middle aged, but these habits apply to someone of any age for optimum living. For those who are older, it is encouraging to know that these habits can reduce the risk of or delay the onset of Alzheimer's dementia. Jonathan Jordan, Licensed Social Worker, outlines 7 habits in his online workshop.

**Eat Nutritious Foods:** Green vegetables, wild salmon (not farm raised), acai berries, blueberries and even coffee (unflavored) are nutritious for the brain.

**Focus Sequentially:** Multi-tasking is a myth according to brain research. We are not actually focusing on two or more things at once, but rather rapidly switching our attention between them. Jordan reports that studies show that when multi-tasking there is a great decrease in the amount of time it takes to accomplish a task, as well as an increase in errors. He states multi-tasking is stressful and has been found to trigger the release of cortisol.

**Be physically active:** Physical activity actually helps the brain produce new neurons (brain cells). Jordan indicates that moderate exercise, twenty to thirty minutes, 3 to 4 times a week is sufficient. Researchers from the University of Illinois have found that in people ages 59 to 81 who exercise moderately, the area of the brain involved in forming memories is larger.



**Participate socially:** Stimulating and supportive relationships, as well as laughter, enhances cognitive functioning. The more social groups we are a member of the better the brain health, says Jordan.

**Sleep well:** Know how much sleep you need, and make it a priority to get it. Sleep deprivation makes the brain work harder and interferes with consolidation of newly learned information.

**Challenge yourself mentally:** Basically, this means to do and learn new things. In addition, Jordan says to make a habit of doing things differently on a regular basis, for example, drive a different route to work, brush your teeth or write with the non-dominant hand, or wear your watch upside down. Learning a musical instrument, computer programming or a foreign language can produce large increases in brain functioning. Crossword puzzles and Sudoku are other ideas.

**Practice Mindfulness:** Interestingly, the most important of the 7 habits is Mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is defined as paying attention to the present without judgment. This means if you are eating, you focus only on the act of eating – the action of chewing and swallowing and how the food tastes. Another example is to focus on one particular sensation while walking. You could focus on the feeling of your feet touching the ground or your arms swinging. When your mind drifts, you bring it back to the focus you chose. Studies have shown that the density of gray matter increases in regions governing memory, self-awareness, and compassion, and decreases in the amygdala—the part of the brain associated with fear and stress. Mindfulness promotes relaxation, which produces the hormone oxytocin. Oxytocin helps us to bond to others, and this sense of belonging promotes brain

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